

A.B.M. CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
CO-OPERATIVE LTD.

A FACTUAL OUTLINE
of
THE ANTIGONISH MOVEMENT

presented at a meeting of
FAO of the United Nations

at
Turrialba, Costa Rica

1949

by

Alexander F. Laidlaw

Revised
1955

EXTENSION DEPARTMENT
ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY
ANTIGONISH, NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The Maritime Provinces	2
The Problem	4
St. Francis Xavier University	6
Objectives of the Program	7
The Basic Principles	9
Techniques, Methods and Tools	11
The Results	12
a) Co-operatives	
b) Picture of a community	
c) Intangible results	
Major Obstacles and Difficulties	20
Staff and Finances	21
References	22
The Significance of this Program	23

THE MARITIME PROVINCES

The "Maritimes" (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island) are the three eastern provinces of Canada, jutting out like a pier on the continent into the Atlantic Ocean. They are about 50,000 square miles in area, equal in size to England or the State of New York. Newfoundland, now the tenth province of Canada, is closely akin to this region both in position and economic background.

The population of these three provinces (1951 census) is about a million and a quarter people. The estimate of population for 1953 was 1,305,000. The most "rural" province is Prince Edward Island (population about 100,000), with about 75% in farming and fishing districts. In Nova Scotia, over half the population is classed as "urban". While the steady trend is towards a greater proportion of urban people, the Maritimes are still rural, about 53% as compared with 38% for Canada as a whole.

Although the rural population of the region shows a gain over the last two census periods, the farm population has declined steadily:

	1931	1941	1951
Rural population	628,124	646,721	672,183
Farm population	413,382	358,482	304,663

This decline in the proportion of farm population within the rural population is another trend, generally seen in America in recent decades, that is changing the composition of the population of the Maritimes.

The chief occupational groups are farmers, fishermen, lumbermen, coal miners, and steelworkers. It is quite common for farming, fishing and lumbering to be carried on as combined occupations at different seasons of the year.

The main racial (language) groups are British (mostly Scottish and Irish) 68%, and French (Acadian) 23%. In the province of New Brunswick, the proportion of French stock was 38% in 1951. The Maritimes have the highest proportion (95%) of native born in Canada, indicating that these provinces

have not been greatly affected by immigration from other countries.

Here is a compact region, with most of the present-day world problems compressed into a small space. With a variety of occupations, different language, racial and religious groups, with industrial workers and rural primary producers, it is our complex world society in miniature. For this reason we may well consider it a social laboratory of significance to other lands.

THE PROBLEM

The economic and social problem of the Maritimes is reflected in the heavy migration from these provinces over the past sixty years. Census figures show that some 568,000 people, generally the young and more ambitious, left the Maritime provinces between 1881 and 1931 to make their homes in the New England States, Central Canada or the newer lands opening up in the West. The decade following World War I, 1921 - 31, was the most disastrous, when an estimated 147,000 people, or more than one-tenth of the population, migrated to what they considered more attractive parts of America. Certain mixed-farming areas were the heaviest losers; in Antigonish County, Nova Scotia, for example, the rural population in 1931 was less than half what it was in 1881.

Fishing communities were particularly depressed in the post-war adjustment period of the 1920's. The total value of marketed fish dropped sharply from \$23 millions in 1918 to less than \$10 millions in 1933. So bad had conditions become that in 1928 the Canadian Government set up a Royal Commission to make a complete study of the fishing industry. Many fishermen in dire poverty faced the future with despair. Unscientific methods of production and marketing and a system of economic feudalism under local traders and fish merchants had brought the oldest industry of the country to its lowest ebb.

Farmers too found themselves engaged in an unprofitable occupation, squeezed between low prices for everything which they sold and high costs for the goods which they bought. Their industry also suffered from generally unscientific practices, lack of organized marketing and a common belief that "farming doesn't pay".

The story of secondary industries in the Maritimes is one of frustrated hopes. At the time of Canadian Confederation (1867) it was expected that the Maritimes, chiefly because of their geographic location, rich stands of timber and coal deposits, would grow into a great industrial region supporting a large urban population as well as a prosperous rural people. But the succeeding years saw a steady decline of all types of industry, chiefly because of the tendency to centralize wealth and economic power in the central Canadian provinces.

We might summarize the problem of the Maritimes by saying that, in spite of considerable natural resources and certain other advantages, they have been an area of retarded development. They have been generally regarded as a region lacking in opportunities for the young and ambitious and in each succeeding generation they lost many of the best of their young men and women, including the better educated and the more energetic.

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY

In the town of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, is the University of St. Francis Xavier, founded in 1853, a diocesan institution under the Catholic Bishop. It is co-educational, specializing in arts and sciences, with a student body of about 1000 at the present time. Xavier Junior College, founded in 1951, is located at Sydney, the industrial centre of Cape Breton. Following World War I a number of priests and laymen in the diocese began to turn their attention to the problem of rural depopulation and the general backward condition of eastern Nova Scotia, and one of the leaders of the time, Dr. J. J. Tompkins, began to stress the need for adult education to solve the economic and social difficulties of the people. Another member of the University staff, Dr. Hugh MacPherson, had for some years been teaching farmers better methods in agriculture, and had assisted them in setting up organizations to market their wool and livestock. It was about this time too (in the early 1920's) that government workers in Departments of Agriculture in Canada began to give courageous leadership and practical assistance to farmers sorely depressed by postwar conditions.

In the year 1929 the Extension Department of the University was established, with Dr. M. M. Coady as Director, to initiate a program of social and economic betterment for the area. It was to be a program of study and adult education in which the people themselves would face up to their problems and remake their lives through self-help and group action. It is only in terms of desire to improve the livelihood of farmers, fishermen, and industrial workers that this university extension program can be understood. While, as Sir Richard Livingstone said, "adult education in England began with the desire to combat intellectual poverty", the St. Francis Xavier brand of adult education sprang from poverty in the physical things of life. And, realizing that a sound society is more than a collection of capable individuals, the emphasis in the program has always been on group enlightenment rather than on individual improvement.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

As the program of the Extension Department developed, the following objectives took shape:

1) To build faith in the country, dispel pessimism and slow down unnecessary migration.

2) To spread the wholesome idea of rural life, its advantages and its possibilities for abundant living.

3) To teach the people to depend on themselves, to look within themselves for the solution of their difficulties and develop a program of self-help.

4) To organize the people to help one another and secure the best reward for their labors through group or co-operative action.

5. To teach the people to approach their problems scientifically; to bring the benefits of technology and science into the lives of the farmers and fishermen.

6. To teach the people first of all to know and realize the natural wealth and potentialities of the country, and then to develop and make best use of all available resources.

7. To teach the people how to come together, irrespective of race or creed, first in study and then in organization to improve their communities.

Looking back over twenty-five years, the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier may now summarize its ultimate objectives in a general way thus:

1) To lift the largest possible number of the people to a higher level of life, economically and socially.

2) To build a comprehensive co-operative structure through which the people will be able to control democratically a significant portion of the total economy, especially in the things that are close to the necessities of life.

3) Through adult education, to lay the economic and social foundation that will permit farmers, fishermen and industrial workers to grow in political understanding, culture and spiritual life.



Co-op Services, Moncton



Bergengren
Credit
Union



A Home in a Co-op Housing
Community



A group of fishermen



Credit Union in a coal
mining community



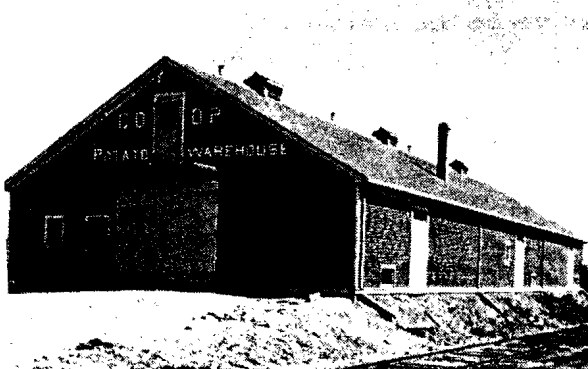
A discussion panel on
Radio Station CJFX



Fishermen's
Credit
Union



A co-op training class
in session



A farmer's warehouse at
Morell, P. E. I.



Consumer co-op in
Reserve Mines, Cape Breton

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES

The principles and techniques which later characterized the Antigonish Movement were not ready for application at the beginning but evolved as the movement grew. The techniques will be outlined later, but the basic principles may be set down now.

The essence of the philosophy on which the Antigonish Movement is built is contained in six principles.

- ① The first of these is the primacy of the individual. This principle is based on both religious and democratic teaching: religion emphasizes the dignity of man, created in the image and likeness of God; democracy stresses the value of the individual and the development of individual capacities as the aim of social organization.

- ② The primacy of the individual gives rise to the second principle: that social reform must come through education. Social progress in a democracy must come through the action of the citizens; it can only come if there is an improvement in the quality of the people themselves. That improvement, in turn, can come only through education.

- ③ The third principle is that education must begin with the economic. In the first place, the people are most keenly interested in and concerned with economic needs; and it is a good technique to suit the educational effort to the most intimate interests of the individual or group. Moreover, economic reform is the most immediate necessity, because the economic problems of the world are the most pressing.

- ④ The fourth principle of the Antigonish Movement is that education must be through group action. Group action is natural because man is a social being. Not only is man commonly organized into groups, but his problems are usually group problems. Any effective adult education program must, therefore, fit into this basic group organization of society.

⑤ The fifth principle is that effective social reform involves fundamental changes in social and economic institutions. It is necessary to face the fact that real reform will necessitate strong measures of change which may prove unpopular in certain quarters.

⑥ The final principle is that the ultimate objective of the movement is a full and abundant life for everyone in the community. Economic co-operation is the first step, but only the first, towards a society which will permit every individual to develop to the utmost limit of his capacities within the framework of a just and good social order.

TECHNIQUES, METHODS AND TOOLS

It is one thing to theorize about adult education; it is quite another to put it into action in a practical and inexpensive way. The following are the chief methods used by the extension workers of this university.

1) The mass meeting. In the beginning this was the chief means of reaching the people in large numbers. In the mass meeting ideas are floated and the community organized. Its chief value lies in the personality of the leader and in the dynamics of his message. At the mass meeting the community is often organized into small groups for study, called study clubs.

2) The study club; also called the discussion circle or discussion group; usually consists of from five to ten people. This is the key educational technique in the Antigonish Movement; it is the foundation of the people's program of adult learning. It is the Socratic method of learning brought up to date and laid against the harsh realities of life with ordinary men and women discussing the everyday problems of life, rather than rich young men of leisure arguing about the essence of truth and beauty. Its success depends on: (a) intelligent local leaders, and (b) the proper study materials. In study clubs the chief danger to guard against is that the people may dissipate their energies in useless talk without leading to realistic action.

3) The leadership school. This is quite similar to the Scandinavian folk school. For many years these schools have been held each winter at Antigonish, lasting four to six weeks, and from them have come many of the present workers and leaders in this work in the Maritimes. In recent years the leadership school and co-operative training courses have been conducted together.

4) The training course. This is specialized instruction on community organization and administration of co-operatives for leaders and business employees.

5) The short course. This is a community refresher course of from one to four days, in which the people renew their early studies, re-examine their problems together and raise their sights to new possibilities of community improvement.

6) Radio listening groups. This is a later variation of the study club, using radio broadcasts to disseminate general ideas and stimulate discussion on vital topics of local interest. Through radio station CJFX a large portion of the rural people in the eastern parts of the Maritimes are reached by a weekly program entitled "Life in These Maritimes", which has been conducted from October to March each year since 1945.

7) "Kitchen" meetings. Through this technique practically every member of community organizations is reached in a short space of a few days by having a number of educational fieldworkers concentrate on one community with as many as five or six meetings a night held in the homes of certain members. Neighbors are invited in and the local situation is thoroughly discussed and ways of action planned.

8) Industrial study classes. These are conducted in urban centres to develop community leaders, particularly in the labor movement. These classes, coupled with a weekly radio program dealing mainly with problems of labour, industry and government, are called "The People's School". They are the main adult education program for the industrial workers in the coal and steel area of eastern Nova Scotia.

9) Tools: (a) Pamphlets. Scores have been published by the Extension Department and many thousands have been distributed.

(b) Library books. Free library service is maintained and widely used by the people.

(c) Educational films. These are used more and more each year; film programs are conducted jointly with the National Film Board of Canada. Colored film-slides are made to illustrate community projects.

(d) Radio. This newer educational medium is proving a great value in the whole program. Radio station CJFX, with 5000 watts output, covers a considerable part of the Maritimes; its "University of the Air" presents a wide range of educational features. Study bulletins for such programs as "Life in These Maritimes" and "The People's School" are distributed to both study groups and individual listeners.

4) Consumer Co-operatives. Founded on Rochdale principles; now about 150 retail outlets in the Maritimes. The former co-operatives and consumer co-operatives reached a turnover of over \$39 millions in 1953.

5) Co-operative Insurance. This is one of the oldest forms of co-operative business -- the farm mutual fire insurance companies. More recently other insurance services have been developed: CUNA Mutual Insurance, now providing over \$20 millions in life insurance protection to credit union members in these three provinces, mostly in the form of Loan Insurance; the Federation of French credit unions in New Brunswick provides similar protection, now amounting to about \$6 millions; the coverage of Co-operative Life Insurance Company in the Maritimes now totalling over \$9½ millions; a service in other forms of insurance (mainly auto and fire) now available through a new organization, Co-operative Fire and Casualty Company.

6) Wholesale Organizations. Maritime Co-operative Services with annual turnover of about \$14 millions, with smaller regional wholesale societies; provide a link between producers and consumers and also a connection with international co-operative organizations.

7) Co-operative Housing. A universal problem is approached through small groups of ten or twelve families who build their homes co-operatively and borrow on 25 year mortgages at 3½% (increased to 4½% in 1951) from the Nova Scotia Housing Commission; about 46 groups now organized.

8) Miscellaneous. Credit Union Leagues, provincial federations of credit unions, providing educational and loan services to credit unions; provincial Co-operative Unions, affiliated in a national organization; "The Maritime Co-operator", the official organ of the movement in the Maritimes, a bi-monthly paper with a circulation of 12,000.

-----000-----

Co-operation is now inseparably woven into the economic and social fabric of the Maritimes and bids fair to become a dominant feature of the life pattern of the people of

these provinces. There have been failures and dissappointments, but this achievement by a people who in the beginning were ill-prepared to launch a program of social reconstruction has been far beyond the fondest hopes of the early pioneers in the work. It shows that a people mobilized in democratic organizations can do great things in the realingment of thair environment without resorting to violent measures or ugly ideologies.

(b) Picture of a community *

"A Fishing Community That Has Found the Way"

Twenty-five years ago the mutterings of discontent began to be heard in our fishing villages. The industry by which the people lived was tobogganning down-hill to hard times, and it was not long before despair stalked up and down the coast. These were years of hunger, when the oldest and one of our richest industries seemed unable to provide the good things of life to an important section of our Maritime population. The fishing community looked done for.

Then came a new hope in the message of adult education and co-operation. Some fishermen in all these twenty years have not listened to this message or have not tested its principles seriously. But other have; and for them and their communities the reward has been great. Let's look at a community where the people have caught a glimpse of the new day and are tasting the rewards of their faith.

We take as our example the village of Grand Etang and the surrounding area within the parish of St. Joseph du Moine in Inverness County, Nova Scotia. In former days it was depressed; it was a scene of poverty and very often despair.

* The original paper described the community of Mo'rell in Prince Edward Island. This description of Grand Etang is an earlier article written in 1949, with figures brought up to 1954.

Like many other fishing communities of the Maritimes, it was in a state of semi-feudalism in which people had little hope to enjoy a decent livelihood. In these days they sang of their poverty in parody:

"Les riches ont tout, les pauvres rien
En roulant ma boule, en roulant....."

But St. Joseph du Moine had the advantage of a pastor who was genuinely interested in the welfare of his people. With sincerity and humility he worked to help them to a better level of life. Today the fruits of his labor and theirs may be seen on every side.

There are about 150 families in the area; fishing and small farming are the main occupations. The people depend mainly on fishing for cash income. Lobsters are one of the most important products. In days gone by before they had a co-operative, the fishermen gathered the rich harvest from the sea for as little as 3¢ a pound. As late as 1918, when the wholesale price of lobsters was at about the same level as it is today, they received 8¢ and 9¢ a pound for their catch. In the year 1948, through co-operative marketing the fishermen received 21½ ¢ a pound for their lobsters. In the case of this product co-operative marketing about doubled their income.

About 80% of the fish in the area now passes through the co-operative, in which there are 45 members. This year the volume turnover in marketing will be over \$100,000. (By 1954 the membership was larger and the volume of business \$357,000). Improvements are gradually being made in the plant and within a few years the fishermen should have a complete fish plant that will handle their products completely.

At Grand Etang there is also a consumer co-operative, Le Moine Co-operative Society, with 100 members. Unlike many co-operatives in the Maritimes, this one is on a strictly cash basis and last year the volume turnover was \$70,000. (In 1954, the figure was \$108,000). This does not sound like the business of a depressed people. They are now building a new co-op store which will be a joy and pride to the members.

There is also a credit union in the area with 320 members and savings approaching \$40,000. (In 1954, the membership was 422 with savings of \$62,000). Included in the 320 members are a number of school children who last year saved \$700.00 in their school credit union. The savings of the credit union are turned over rapidly in loans for provident and productive purposes, and both loans and savings are insured through the CUNA Mutual Insurance Society. This is insurance protection which most people never had before and which is provided them as a service by their credit unions.

The spirit of Co-operation has brought community services and benefits on several fronts. For example, through the credit union and co-operative store 125 families, comprising perhaps 90% of the population, are protected by group hospitalization and they help to support the hospital a few miles away in the village of Cheticamp. With better income and a new outlook on life there is also a new attitude towards health.

Homes in the area are being improved and beautified. All homes are electrified and practically all of them have radios. An estimated 20% of the homes in the area now have bathrooms, and it is interesting to note that there are 32 automobiles in the community, which seems like a fairly high percentage for 150 families, and especially in an area that was so poor a little more than a decade ago.

Although primarily a fishing area, agriculture is not neglected; and indeed one sees here more and better farming than in certain other parts of the county that have far greater natural fertility. Here again the people are working together for progress. With a number of other communities they operate a tractor and plow and also a bulldozer to break land and make farming easier for those who have to fish at the same time.

There is a noticeable improvement in schools and a new attitude towards education. There are four schools in the parish and next year three of them will be two-department schools. Two schools are now furnished with running water; all have electric lights and two departments have radios. There is a motion picture projector and film slide projector for the use of the schools, and all four schools have Home and School Associations.

Domestic Science is now taught and there is also a community library. An outdoor rink has been built; the boys of the parish have a baseball team and there is a growing interest in sports. All of this is evidence of a community growing in vitality.

Improvements in material things has not resulted in any decline in moral and spiritual life. There is no liquor problem in this area. Moreover, it is worth noting that the people take pride in paying their taxes on time; in the past year they came second in the municipality with 80% of taxes paid in the current year.

The study club program continues; and while the people are proud of what they have achieved, they know that there is much yet to be done. Only those who knew Grant Etang and the surrounding area in former days can appreciate the change that has taken place. If we had to choose between St. Joseph du Moine and one of our big cities in which to face a depression, we'd choose our fishing village on the Inverness shore. And even in fairly prosperous times, it's a good place to live, for a group of fishermen with a vision have pinned their hopes on Co-operation and are sticking by it.

(c) Intangible results

There are other, but intangible, results of this program of adult education and community organization. They are more difficult to assess and prove, but nonetheless real to those who have watched the changing picture in many Maritime communities in the last twenty-five years. Of course there has been a general awakening in every phase of life in these provinces in the past two decades, and we have also passed through the artificial prosperity of a war boom; and so in most cases one cannot definitely state to what extent improvement or change has been brought about by this movement. However, we can say that the following improvements have been to a greater or less extent stimulated by the Antigonish Movement.

1) Primary producers, farmers and fishermen, are adopting a more scientific approach to their occupations.

2) There is a general awakening in public

education and better school facilities, particularly in communities where co-operative organization has been successful.

3) There is a greater interest in better public utilities and less opposition to the taxation necessary to maintain them.

4) Primary producers who were indifferent to governmental services, chiefly in the field of agricultural promotion, are now eager to accept these services.

5) Religious intolerance has been largely laid aside and there is a better understanding than ever before amongst various denominations.

6) There is a conviction in many quarters that the Maritimes have a great future and that there are great potentialities to be explored for the benefit of the people.

7) A large body of the people are now convinced that they and succeeding generations can go on to do great things in building a better social order and a more secure economic system.

MAJOR OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES

It must not be thought that this experiment in social reconstruction has been carried on without opposition or difficulties. Society tends to become set like mortar and it is not a pleasant or an easy task for him who tries to break it down and reset it in a different way. Looking back upon twenty-five years of this program, we see these as the greatest obstacles that were encountered, and in some cases still encountered, in this work:

- 1) The lethargy of the people, who for long generations have become accustomed to having others think for them and direct their lives.
- 2) The general conviction of the great masses of the people that "it can't be done".
- 3) The pride of most people, even in desperate circumstances, who are not willing to admit that they need help or that their position calls for improvement.
- 4) The resentment, at first, to university men "telling us how to farm or fish when we've been doing it all our lives."
- 5) Opposition from those who rule economically and do not want to see any change in the status quo.
- 6) Dishonest and incompetent leaders (they turn up in every movement), who frequently resort to racial or religious prejudice to further their own ends.
- 7) Like other programs of adult education, ours has always suffered from lack of funds to carry on the work; the task is colossal but the means to carry it on meagre indeed.

STAFF AND FINANCES

The original staff of the Extension Department was only two; there are now twenty-six on the staff and a number of part-time workers besides. But actually this is only a small part of those who are in the program as leaders and educational workers; innumerable volunteers, clergymen, community-spirited individuals, co-operative business leaders -- these and many others have been adult educators in the real sense of the term in this movement.

The Extension Department for the past number of years has received a grant (\$46,000 for the present year) from the Government of Canada to conduct its educational work in the fishing communities of the Maritimes. Grants were given by the Carnegie Foundation in the early stages of the work and a number of smaller donations have been received from liberal-minded philanthropists. The University itself has contributed over \$400,000 from its funds to carry on the program and in addition has supplied many services and personnel without charge. The budget for the current year is about \$85,000.

REFERENCES

The story of the Antigonish Movement is more fully told and explained in the following:

1) Periodical:

The Extension Bulletin (Nov. 1933 - May 1939)
The Maritime Co-operator (Since June 1939)

2) Books:

Masters of Their Own Destiny, by Dr. M. M. Coady
Democracy's Second Chance, by George Boyle
Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia, by Geo. Boyle

3) Pamphlets:

The Antigonish Way
The Social Significance of the Co-op Movement
The Antigonish Movement
Maritime Co-ops
and many others
published by the Extension Department, and in
numerous pamphlets and magazine articles
published elsewhere.

4) Films:

The Lord Helps Those, produced by Harmon
Foundation
Owners All, by Harmon Foundation
The Rising Tide, by the National Film Board
of Canada.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROGRAM

The world today is seeking a way out of the morass of social conflict and economic insecurity of the masses of the people. Here is a program that has worked in a complex area and may be applied to many parts of the world to fill the vacuum that exists in the lives of a great sector of humanity. It proves what can be done when a democratic people, motivated by good will and a spirit of self-help, determine to reconstruct their lives without resorting to extreme ideologies or revolutionary tactics. The Antigonish Movement is a challenge to the idea that there must always be a submerged portion of the population, the "have-nots", the dispossessed people who can never hope to share the good things of life or rise to a decent level of livelihood.

It is later than we think. In many parts of the world where depressed and dissatisfied people grow in number, it is simply a matter of who gets there first. We must act now to funnel the energies of the people towards goals of social betterment, or they will surely be diverted along roads leading to the disintegration of society as we know it and the destruction of the things which we cherish and would preserve.

A.B.M. CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
CO-OPERATIVE LTD.